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W O R D
T O A ^K
S C H I S M A T I C.



L O N D O N,

Printed in the Year, MDCCLIX.





A

Word to a SCHISMATIC.

PITY to your soul obliges me to reprove your sin. Surely you ought to be rebuked for your iniquity ! Do you call Christ your Lord, and yet, dare to rend his seamless coat, and destroy the communion of his saints ! *O consider this, lest be tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you !*

Be assured, that where there is not the “*UNITY of the spirit in the bond of PEACE,*” there is no true religion. *Envy and strife and division,* shew that we are *carnal*, notwithstanding all our professions of the christian faith. While we are *proud, self-willed and contentious*, we do but flatter ourselves with being “*Members of Christ, and children of God.*” If we *divide* the affections of christians, or become makers of *Parties*, we surely are, God himself being the judge, the *schismatics* and *heretics* his word condemns : and his word alone, can determine what is *schism* or *heresy* ; and what punishment will follow such as wickedly fall into so great an evil.

We

The scripture assures us, that *all* true Christians have *one God and Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, who is in them all*, and who is the glorious, living and only head of those that truly believe in him. Likewise, that all real members of his body, are united in pure affection, by his Holy Spirit. Now where there is not this *tender care one for another*, there is *schism*; that is, *an alienation of affection*: and wherever this *inward division*, this *loss of love* one towards another, breaks forth into *outward strife and contention*, it becomes *heresy*. † 1 Cor. xii. 25.

It may be you have not considered these things in this scriptural light. Rather, you have thought that *Schism* was a man's refusing to join in *your* worship; and that *heresy* was his not believing *your* articles of faith. And the evil fruit of this may possibly have been, that you were possessed of an angry, bitter zeal, against every man you supposed to have been a *schismatic*. Surely, if so, you have greatly erred! You have found out *new sins*: — sins that are not spoken of in the Bible. And then, how easy it is to grow wiser than the inspired writers; and proceed even to *mend* what is written in the book of God! But if we *add* to that book, God will surely add to us *all the plagues that are written in it!* (Rev. xxii. 18.) Let us beware, lest Christ should give us up to a vile, persecuting spirit, and suffer us to

† See the first Epistle to the Corinthians throughout, where we shall find the meaning of schism is division. Heresy signifies a sect or party, of every sort. So the christians were called by the usual term of a distinct heresy, (Acts xx. 22. where we translate it—sect.) The meaning of the word Church, is a gathering together of people. See Acts xix. 32, 39, 40. where it is translated assembly, and concourse, or mob.

destroy the righteous from the earth, thinking thereby, to do him service. What if we could *tempt*, or *drive* all the *fearful*, the *unbelieving*, or *abominable* * into our church and party; yet, what manner of converts would these be? Certainly, they would be fit only for everlasting destruction; seeing a man must first renounce his conscience and play the hypocrite, before he can give up what he believes to be *right*, or embrace what he thinks is *wrong*.

Our Lord has clearly determined this point, if we will but yield to his decision. He commands that we *invite* and persuade *every creature* to come to the *gospel feast*; and that we go after them, *into all the world*: but if any make light of his offered mercy, if they prefer their *oxen* and *farms* to the blessings of the gospel, we are to be so far from *driving* them into his church, or *persecuting* them for NOT COMING, that he expressly forbids they should even *taste of his supper*. || Every argument of *reason* and *scripture* is to be tried to *compel* them to return to God: if possible, we are to *pluck them* as brands out of the fire. § Afterwards, we are to leave them to stand or fall to their own Master; and only pray for their conversion. Nay if a man were righteous in every other respect, and only so far a sinner as to become a real *heretic*, or *party-maker*; yet we are to be so far from *constraining* him to *abide* in our church and party, that *after the first or second admonition*, (not to set one christian's mind against another, nor strive for one against another,) we are to *reject*, and leave him to himself. † *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!*

That

* Rev. xxi. 8. || Mark xvi. 15. Luke xiv. 16, &c.
 § 2 Cor. v. 11. Jude 23. † Titus iii. 10.

That we may still have a more clear idea of the nature of *schism*, &c. let us remember, that the *Corinthians*, who were the grand *schismatics*, were all of one Church: and either there was no *dissention* about forms or other outward circumstances of religion, amongst them; or else it is plain, the apostle laid no stress on any thing of this kind; nor so much as reckoned it a part of the gospel he preached, (1 Cor. xv. 1.) Schism is, so far from being the leaving the outward communion of the church, that if any of that congregation had left it, before the division began, it would have been impossible for such to have been guilty of the schism there spoken of. To have departed from the communion of a christian congregation, without just cause, would have been a grievous crime: but still it would not have been the sin of *schism*, any more than that of *drunkenness* or *fornication*. A man may become a *separatist*, or an *apostate*; yea, a very *incendiary*, a *persecutor*, or a *tempter*, like his father the devil; but this is not *schism*: it is a much greater offence, and a crime of a quite different nature. *Schism* necessarily implies an outward union; and is, through a blind, mistaken zeal, for things or persons, an inward decay of holy affection towards our brethren; and *heresy* is the fruit, the almost inseparable effect of it; the breaking forth into outward strife and contention; the crying, " I am of Paul, and I of Apollos ! " Here is both *schism* and *heresy* too. Not but any of the *Corinthians* might have cleaved to the preaching of Paul, and have followed any peculiar mode of his; but they might not make parties for him. They might have chosen Apollos for their pastor, but they might not strive against Cephas. They might have joined with the church of Jerusalem, and have followed the peculiar mode of James, our Lord's brother; or have united

united with the first that were called Christians at Antioch, and followed any external form amongst them; but no one might make a party for or against another: This was what the Holy Ghost so severely condemned. How greatly then, have we erred if we have supposed that *schism* was the going from this or the other church and party; and that *heresy* consisted in any peculiar mode of worship, or in what we may chance to call *wrong opinions*! What havock has been, in all ages, made of the flock of Christ, by *satan*, and by all those who, forsaking the oracles of God, set up commandments of their own! What bloodshed, what cruel, and more than heathen oppression of the innocent! and yet, for no other reason, than because they would not defile a pure conscience, and obey men rather than God. But whilst the righteous suffered, the wicked, the most abandoned of all, were, at the same time, allowed to wallow in sins of a crimson die: *this was not schism*! They might break the laws of God, and church-unity was still preserved! But if those that feared God, and to whom his precepts were dearer than thousands of gold and silver; if these dared to reject the *doctrines of men*, that they might hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, they were soon appointed as sheep for the slaughter — the cry was loud and instant — *away with such fellows! it is not fit they should live.* But what account will their murderers give when God shall say, “Who has required this at your hands?”

And why all this fury and blood-shed! Why this unreasonable, unscriptural, and even hellish destruction of God's people? When neither the *unity*, nor *well-being*, of a church depends on our being all of one *opinion*, or all following one way of *outward worship*; but ONLY on our *loving one another*, as Christ loved us, and *worshipping him in spirit and in truth*; Which alone constitutes the whole ESSENCE of true religion. As for the apostles, the men who had seen and conversed

conversed with Christ himself, and who were peculiarly endued with power from on high, it is evident, that they did not confine themselves to any particular *outward* form of worship, or each use the very same, either in public or private, that another apostle observed. For we find the disciples at *Jerusalem* were all zealous of the ceremonial law; (Acts xxi. 20.) but the apostle of the *Gentiles* would by no means suffer those rites to be retained in his churches: no, not amongst his *jewish* converts: (Gal. iv. 10, 11. v. 2.) And though in a particular case, he circumcised *Timothy*; (Acts xvi. 3.) yet he would not circumcise *Titus*. (Gal. ii. 3.) Indeed, for the most part, *To them that were under the ceremonial law, he was under the law; to them that were without that law; he was without it also;* (1 Cor. ix. 20, 21.) condescending, in indifferent things, to the judgment of others, and the customs of the places where he presided. Farther, in Acts x. 9. we read, that "*Peter went up upon the house top to pray, about the sixth hour.*" This was a usual time with the Jews for prayer; and the upper part of the house was the common place for their devotions: but it does not appear, that *all* the apostles did this; or that *Peter* himself observed this hour, and retired to this kind of place, in *every part* of the world where he preached; much less can we suppose, that those preachers, whom God chose from amongst the *Gentile* converts, that *they* regarded any one peculiar ceremony that the *Jewish* apostles might retain to the last: yet all christians, in all times and places, worshipped the same God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we allow that Christ taught his apostles the *truth* of his gospel, and that their example is to be our pattern, let us but read what is written, and we shall find that they proclaimed every where, that men should *repent* and *believe* the gospel. If any opposed and blasphemed, and so judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, they shook their raiment, and

and departed from them: If any of their own flock turned the grace of God into wantonness, the rest could have no fellowship with them. Sin, and *that only*, made a breach between the church and any of its members. But as for *external modes*, or *circumstantial* of religion, we do not learn, from scripture, that even any one of the apostles exactly followed the same method in all the churches he planted. Forms and ceremonies might be modellized and adjusted differently, according to the various customs and dispositions of different countries. As for instance — In the eastern nations, the disciples would naturally eat the Lord's supper in the same posture in which they were accustomed to take their common meals, which was a recumbent posture, almost lying down; others would, of course, take it sitting; others kneeling, or whilst standing up: each in the particular posture he had been most accustomed to. In some places, where their wines were very strong, they would naturally mix water, in celebrating the eucharist; in others, where their wines were weaker, it is reasonable to suppose they would *not* do it. In hot countries, where bathing was as customary, as for us to wash our hands, they would naturally baptize by going into the water: in colder climates, they would as naturally use only sprinkling, as the virtue of that ordinance no more depended on the *quantity* of water, than the benefit of the Lord's supper depended on the *size* of the bread which was eaten. In one place they were accustomed to pray *standing*; in another, to worship *falling down to the ground*, in another, to pray *kneeling* *: so in every part of the world where the light of the gospel shone, each might, more or less retain, in their religious assemblies, their own accustomed posture of body,

* Mark xi. 25. Mat. xxvi. 39. Luke xxii. 41.
 & Cor. xiv. 25.

body, whilst they all worshipped the same living and true God, and behaved decently; making no disturbance in the congregation they united with, (1 Cor. xi. 4, 5. — xiv. 20, 34)

To conclude, The apostles were, of all men, not superstitious, or zealous, about any *outward forms* whatever; nor did they ever oppress any man's conscience, or give the least warrant for our intermeddling with another's opinion; but expressly the contrary — “ *not that we have dominion over your faith,*” saith the greatest of all the apostles, (2 Cor. i. 24.) If a disciple was seduced by *false teachers*, or did otherwise amiss, they warned him in the name of Christ, and mildly urged *reason and scripture* to convince him, (Gal. vi. 1. 2 Tim. ii. 24.) If he became an *idolater*, or “ *denied the Father and the Son,*” or affirmed, “ *that Jesus was not the Christ,*” or that he “ *was not come in the flesh;*” this must, of necessity, cause them to separate from such persons: for what fellowship could there be between Christ and Belial? These were then, left to the judgment of God and their own conscience. But still, the apostles hurt no man; oppressed not even the worst of all. If any that professed the faith, committed a great offence, then by faith and prayer, the offender was delivered to *satan*: (1 Cor. v. 4, 5.) not his *body* to *prison* or to *death*: this is the sword of *antichrist* the weapon of the *carnal, worldly church*, that having lost the power of God, take up the *sword*, and *burn* with fire as they see good: nay, so far were any of the true disciples of Christ from being persecutors of their brethren, that whenever evil was done against themselves, by their bitterest enemies, they only besought the Almighty to take the cause in hand, and plead for them against their oppressors, (Acts iv. 29 — xii. 5.) As for DIFFERENT OPINIONS “ *one man believed he might eat all things; another ate herbs: one man esteemed* one

one day above another ; another esteemed every day alike.
 " Let every man, said the inspired writer, be fully
 " persuaded in his own mind. But who art thou that
 " judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he
 " stands or falls. Rom. xiv. 4."

If all parties and denominations of christians, instead of upbraiding one another, with the uncharitable term of *schismatic* or *heretic*, had but walked by *this* rule ; and had let the unerring word of sacred writ decide in all their controversies : if all, or if any one christian church, had dealt so faithfully with God and man as to have received or rejected, approved or condemned, nothing but according to the *letter*, the *unaltered*, *unmixed* word of holy scripture, humbly read, and simply expounded, without art or force put on it : if all, or if any, had granted that just liberty of conscience, which God has given to every soul as an inheritance : if they had inveighed only against that *schism*, and that *heresy*, which the scripture speaks of, and have agreed to unite in peace and good-will, in all *self-denial*, and *crucifying of the flesh* ; O how good and profitable would it have been for the disciples of that master, who is all *holiness* and *love*, *meekness* and *humility* ; and whose real church is composed of none but those who bear his blessed *image*, and are *like himself* ! But where the vile dissenter from God and his holy word : dissenters in uncleanness of heart, and unholiness of life : where these sons of *Belial*, whose church is but the synagogue of satan, make laws of *their own*, and bind *their burdens* on others consciences — they *themselves* become the schismatical ringleaders of all disturbance and confusion. And whatever such may think, and however the carnal, the unjust and deluded, may applaud them ; yet unless *they* have dominion over a man's faith,
 and

and their laws are binding to a scrupulous conscience, a person must necessarily be a dissenter from them, or from the Almighty himself.

If any of us then, have judged others, O let us repent of our own schism; our inward divisions and want of love to our fellow christians! If we have made parties, crying up one teacher, and running down another: Let us repent of our own wicked heresies, and no longer judge our neighbour, but pray that our own heart may be changed, and that we may have power to love ALL that love the Lord. *Jesus in sincerity! Amen.*

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